

Matthew 5:43-48 – “Be Perfect?”

Last week we looked at #4 and #5 of these 6 illustrations of the law that Jesus is laying out in the Sermon on the Mount to show that our righteousness does not come from performing outward works, it's a matter of the heart. Because though a person could live out the law outwardly, eventually he's going to break it inwardly through attitudes and thoughts.

So, Jesus begins each of these 6 illustrations with **“You have heard that it was said...”** and in so doing He's countering their perception of what it means to fulfill the law. He then adds, **“But I say to you...”**, and in so doing He seeks to break down the true heart and understanding of the law.

Last week we looked at **Sincerity** and **Surrender** with the 4th and 5th examples from the law, now we look at **Selflessness** as we cover the last example.

1. Selflessness – 5:43-48

5:43-47 - “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ ⁴⁴ But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, ⁴⁵ that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. ⁴⁶ For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷ And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so?”

Now remember, Jesus is not just quoting what the Bible or the law said, He's quoting what was passed down in “oral law”, their traditions which made up the Mishna. You don't find in the Bible, **hate your enemy**.

Some Jews saw certain O.T. Scriptures seeming to say this:

- **Psalm 139:19–22**, *“Oh, that You would slay the wicked, O God! Depart from me, therefore, you bloodthirsty men. ²⁰ For they speak against You wickedly; Your enemies take Your name in vain. ²¹ Do I not hate them, O Lord, who hate You? And do I not loathe those who rise up against You? ²² I hate them with perfect hatred; I count them my enemies.”*
- **Psalm 140:9–11**, *“As for the head of those who surround me, Let the evil of their lips cover them; ¹⁰ Let burning coals fall upon them; Let them be cast*

into the fire, Into deep pits, that they rise not up again. ¹¹ Let not a slanderer be established in the earth; Let evil hunt the violent man to overthrow him.”

- So, some found a sort of justification to hate the enemies of God. It was righteous indignation in their eyes.

But Jesus comes along and says, *I say, love your enemies and bless them!* This was radical stuff to those listening in on this Sermon.

This love that we are to show to others is not something we do according to our feelings or emotions. This isn't a command when we feel like doing it. Love is something that comes from a choice, a decision. It is governed by our will and desire to obey God. And it's not something we do by our natural ability. This comes only about as those born again and regenerated by the Spirit of God.

- And you know a great way to increase your love to those that are hard to love? Pray for them! And not one of those imprecatory Psalm prayers. You know the kind where the Psalmist is asking God to break their teeth in their mouth (Ps. 58:6). No! We're talking about praying for God to bless them. And when you do, guess what? You begin to develop God's heart for them. You begin to grow in love.
- Even God isn't quick to cast down judgement on those who are rebelling against Him. Rather Jesus says that He **sends rain on the just and on the unjust**. God is good and compassionate; He's not treating His enemies any different. Oh, we know there will come a time when people will reap what they sow and the judgment of God will come but leave that to God.

When we live out this life of love, we show ourselves to be other worldly. This is a love that is not common. It shows we are *sons of our Father in heaven* (5:45).

- This isn't meaning this is the **way** to be sons of our Father. But that this is what **shows** us to be sons of our Father.

Living this Kingdom way should cause us to stand out – we represent the King! We should be different than the world. If we're just loving the lovable, how is that different from what anyone else does? Even the low life tax collectors did that. Jesus said they will know that you are My disciples by your love (John 13:35).

- Daily remind yourself that you too were the unlovable, the rebellious. Yet Jesus selflessly laid down His life to show you the extent of His love for you!
- And we're called to lay our lives down in like manner.

“The whole secret of living this kind of life is that man should be utterly detached. He must be detached from others in the sense that his behaviour is not governed by what they do. But still more important, he should be detached from himself, for until a man is detached from himself he will never be detached from what others do to that self. As long as a man is living for himself, he is sensitive, watchful and jealous; he is envious and is therefore always reacting immediately to what others do. He is in intimate contact with them. The only way to detach yourself from what others do to you is that you first of all detach yourself from yourself. That is the principle that governs not only this paragraph but the previous one also. The Christian is a man who is taken out of this present evil world. He is placed in a position apart and lives on a higher level. He belongs to a different kingdom.

He is a new man, a new creature, a new creation. Because of that, he sees everything differently, and therefore reacts in a different manner. He is no longer of the world, but outside it. He is in a position of detachment. ‘There’, says Christ, ‘you can become like God in this respect, that you will no longer be governed exclusively by what other people do to you; you will have something within you that will determine your conduct and behaviour?’”¹

Then, in the midst of all this, Jesus kind of drops a bomb on His audience:

5:48 - *Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.*"

This could be the most important verse of the Sermon on the Mount. But one that could give a lot of anxiety to people wondering, ‘*Is God really asking us to be as perfect as He is? Does He not see how weak we are??*’

Now it’s true that if you want to be right with God by how you live, you’re going to need to be perfect. We’re talking without sin. And guess what? There’s only 1 person in the entire history of the human race that has ever done that – Jesus! And that’s kind of the point. Following the outward observance of the law isn’t going to save you because the heart is going to condemn you and reveal your guilt.

Perfection doesn’t come from our perfect adherence to the law, it comes through a perfect Jesus.

- **Romans 8:3–4**, *"For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on*

¹ Lloyd-Jones, Dr. Martyn (1959). *Studies In The Sermon On The Mount*. Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit."

The word **Perfect** is the Greek word *Teleios*. William Barclay breaks this down for us well:

Teleios is the adjective formed from the noun *telos*. *Telos* means an *end*, a *purpose*, an *aim*, a *goal*. A thing is *teleios* if it achieves the purpose for which it is planned; human beings are perfect if they achieve the purpose for which they were created and sent into the world."²

What are we created for? To be conformed into the image of Jesus Christ (Romans 8:29).

And we reflect Jesus well when we uphold our word and speak with sincerity, when we surrender our rights to bless others, and when we walk in selfless love toward others.

God is not expecting us to be sinlessly perfect, though we should never think there's a valid reason to succumb to sin. But what God does desire for us is to be moving on into maturity. This word perfect is more about completeness and maturing. It's living out this life that truly resembles Jesus. That's what should be our aim. Allow the Lord to keep perfecting you. This is the mark of the mature believer.

Being perfect is not so much a **command** as it is a **summation**. We don't have to be people that are being controlled by what the world does around us, or by how people treat us. We don't have to feel beat down and offended by threats or hurts against us if we are truly following Jesus and allowing Him to make us new. Be who He has made you to be, perfect and mature – a child of God who resembles your Heavenly Father rather than the god of this age.

"If Christ loves me, does it matter who hates me? If He smiles on me, does it matter who frowns on me? If He says I'm His, does it matter who rejects me?"

- Leonard Ravenhill

² Barclay, W. (2001). *The Gospel of Matthew* (Third Ed., p. 204). Saint Andrew Press.